

An immigrant embraces Long Island

BY FILIZ TURHAN

Like many people of his era, my dad never talked much about his childhood. Luckily, a few years ago, he agreed to tell me about how he came to America. In some respects, his is a typical immigrant story, although the details are unique. Born on a farm in eastern Turkey in 1930, Mustafa Turhan dreamed of moving away, first to Istanbul and then to America. Although a tailor by trade, he picked up enough welding skills to work his way across the Atlantic on a cargo boat.

When he arrived in Brooklyn in 1955, he knew no one, did not speak English, and carried only about \$7 in his pocket. With a lot of faith, hard work and good luck, he put his tailoring skills to work, and in just a few years, he owned a dry-cleaning business on South Village Avenue in Rockville Centre.

After nine years, Dad returned to Turkey, where he married the love of his life, Guler Boluk. She was just 22 and sacrificed everything familiar to take a leap into the unknown, **with a life in America**



The writer as a toddler, left, in 1969 with her parents, Mustafa and Guler Turhan, and brother, Tamer, in the family's Rockville Centre shop.

with her new husband. My brother, Tamer, was born in 1966, and I was right behind him. Mom learned to speak English by watching soap operas like "The Edge of Night," to drive, and eventually to run a successful boutique, Melo Hi Fashion, on South Park Avenue in Rockville Centre. Our family lived frugally in a room in the back of the shop until my parents could afford a

solid brick house in a nice neighborhood in Freeport.

For many years, it was just the four of us in the United States, but our parents made wonderful new traditions for us: Saturday nights meant pizza at Nunley's Carousel in Baldwin, hours of fun playing pinball and going on the rides. Long summer Sundays meant afternoons jumping the waves at Point Lookout and evenings

playing flashlight tag with our neighbors. Mom and Dad loved to buy fresh mackerel and whiting from Captain Ben's fishing boat on Freeport's Nautical Mile, while my brother and I enjoyed Randall Park nearby. We would pray for long lines at the boat to maximize our time on the monkey bars.

Our parents proudly attended our many school events, especially all the concerts and plays we participated in through Freeport High School's excellent music department. One of our last outings as a foursome, when my brother and I were in our 20s, was to the Shinnecock Powwow, where Dad loved the costumes and the sound of the drums. We were enthusiastic observers of American holidays, including Independence Day and Thanksgiving, and always rang in the new year with Dick Clark. Holiday pictures show us gathered around the dining room table, with Dad always at the center, our American pioneer.

When Dad was diagnosed with lung cancer at age 87 in 2017, he decided to forgo treat-

ment. Mother took care of him at home and for a while he still pursued his passions: reading the news, digging in the garden and tinkering in his garage. He passed away gently in September in the Freeport home where he lived for 50 years, surrounded by his loved ones, which now included in-laws, grandchildren, nieces and nephews.

A few months earlier, we had asked Dad whether he wanted to be buried in the cemetery on the family farm back in Turkey. No, he said. Although he was proud of his Turkish heritage, America was the adopted home that he loved. He wanted to be laid to rest right here. He is buried in the Muslim section of a cemetery in Mount Sinai, under an expansive Long Island sky.



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